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Geschichte des französischen Romans im xvii. Jahrhundert ii, p. 70; *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France* i, pp. 38-48.

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THE SEMASIOLOGY OF *understand*,
verstehen, *ἐπιστυμαί*.

IN the December number of the MOD. LANG. NOTES Prof. George Hempl takes exception to my explanation of *understand*, etc. It may be that my language was "more or less obscure," and that consequently Prof. Hempl was unable to "separate out or distinguish" my real meaning. Allow me, therefore, to make a desperate effort to express myself less elusively in order that my meaning may be more easily 'caught.'

My statement in the May number, 1899, was:

"In words expressing separation the meaning 'understand' may develop in two ways: 1. 'separate,' 'distinguish'; 2. 'separate,' 'take away,' 'take in,' 'perceive.' To the first class belong Lat. *cerno*, *distinguo*; to the second *intelligo*, *percipio*."

Prof. Hempl says:

"This classification seems to me not quite satisfactory. I propose instead: 1. 'separate,' 'unterscheiden,' 'distinguish,' or 'gather,' 'intelligo,' 'understand.' 2. 'grasp,' 'begreifen,' 'perceive.' 3. 'take in,' 'devour,' 'swallow (gullibly)."

My classification was not intended to be complete. In it I confined myself to "words expressing separation," dividing them into two classes. These two classes Prof. Hempl combines in his class 1. 'separate,' 'unterscheiden,' 'distinguish' [my class 1.], or 'gather,' 'intelligo,' 'understand' [my class 2.]. What I mean by 'separate,' 'take away,' 'take in,' Prof. Hempl expresses by 'gather,' 'intelligo.' My choice of words may have been infelicitous. My intention, however, was to call attention to what seems to me a plainly marked distinction between 1. 'separate,' 'distinguish' and 2. 'separate,' 'take away,' 'take to oneself,' 'take into the mind,' 'perceive.'

That, as I take it—notice that 'take' here means 'understand' and belongs to my second class of such words—is what Prof. Hempl implies by his class 1. For though he puts un-

der one head the two ideas 'distinguish' and 'gather' (that is, 'infer,' 'take into the mind'), he separates them by 'or' and must have kept them distinct in his mind. For Prof. Hempl has a keenly logical mind, and no logical mind could do otherwise.

Prof. Hempl's class 2. 'grasp,' 'begreifen,' 'perceive' [why not 'comprehend' rather than 'perceive' ?], I did not discuss at all. For such terms do not imply separation but the taking of a subject into the mind in its entirety, and hence the thorough mastery of an idea or a subject. I had said, however, in the first paragraph of my article:

"A term denoting insight, perception, understanding, may primarily mean one of several things, the most common of which are: 'sharpness,' 'keenness,' 'acuteness' [for example, *penetrate*]; 'grasping,' 'comprehension'; 'separating,' 'distinguishing.'"

Prof. Hempl's class 3. 'take in,' 'devour,' 'swallow (gullibly)' was still farther from my mind. For these terms imply neither separation nor understanding. The turn given to 'take in' here is entirely different from its use in my classification.

Several other classes might be added to these, as: 'follow,' implying rapidity of thought or speech in the person heard; 'trace,' implying an indistinct or hidden meaning; 'unravel,' implying intricacy or ambiguity; 'fathom,' implying depth of thought; 'construe,' implying a comparison of related parts; 'turn the attention,' 'give heed to,' *animadverto*, etc.

After quoting another passage from my article, in which I referred *verstehen* and *understand* to my class 2, Prof. Hempl says:

"In this I do not agree with Prof. Wood. German *verstehen* and English *understand* are cases of class 1, not of class 2, and so is Greek *ἐπιστυμαί*."

And yet Prof. Hempl in his class 1.—'gather,' 'intelligo,' 'understand,' explains *understand* as I did.

Continuing Prof. Hempl says:—

"OE. *understandan* was originally simply 'to stand between,' and so 'to keep apart,' 'to separate,' and it, like Lat. *distinguo*, German *unterscheiden*, etc., got the figurative meaning 'distinguish,' 'make out,' 'understand,' 'know how (to)' (and in German, *unterstehen* passed on to 'undertake (to),' 'presume (to)'). But the

same is true of German *verstehen*, OE. *forstandan*. These originally meant 'to stand in front of,' 'to keep off (from some one else),' 'to separate,' and hence 'to distinguish,' 'to make out,' 'to understand.' Just so, Greek *ἐπίσταναι* originally means, as still shown in *ἐπίσταναι ἐφίστημι*, 'to stand in front of,' 'to oppose,' 'to check,' 'to keep off.' Hence the meaning 'to separate' and metaphorically 'to distinguish,' 'to understand,' 'to know how,' as shown in *ἐπίσταναι*."

Let us once more examine *understand*, *verstehen*, *ἐπίσταναι*. For OE. *understandan* Prof. Hempl assumes certain meanings. Now an assumption is all right provided we have nothing better. But since any given signification may develop in innumerable ways, we can never be sure of a conclusion drawn from an assumption. I agree with Prof. Hempl—or rather he agrees with me—in seeing in E. *understand* the primary meaning 'separate.' But this separation is not an 'auseinandernehmen,' but a 'zusichnehmen,' 'vernehmen.' Compare especially the following significations of MHG. *understān*: 'etwas bewahren,' 'über sich nehmen,' 'unternehmen,' 'erreichen,' 'ansich reissen,' 'entreissen' with OE. *understandan* 'take for granted,' 'assume,' 'annehmen,' 'perceive,' 'understand.' Germ. *unterstehen* carries out the idea contained in MHG. *understān*, *-stēn*, and did not pass through the meaning 'understand.' Compare Lat. *ad-sūmo*, *ad-rogo* 'take to oneself,' 'assume,' 'arrogate.'

OHG. *firstantan*, MHG. *verstān* *-stēn* 'intercept,' 'notice,' 'perceive,' 'understand,' OE. *forstandan* 'intercept,' 'understand' show the same development of meaning as OE. *understandan*. Compare OE. *under-niman* 'take upon oneself,' 'undertake,' 'take in,' 'understand,' OHG. *fir-neman* 'take away, take to oneself,' 'perceive.' (For other examples see my article in the May issue, vol. xiv, 1899, of MOD. LANG. NOTES.)

In Gk. *ἐπίσταναι* Prof. Hempl assumes the development 'stand in front of,' 'oppose,' 'check,' 'keep off,' 'separate,' 'distinguish,' 'understand.' Here also we shall find it safer to confine ourselves strictly to the authentic usage of *ἐφίστημι* and *ἐπίσταναι*. The former word is actually used in the sense of 'stand in front of,' 'oppose,' 'check,' but never, so far as I can find, in the sense of 'keep off,' 'separate.'

That would be expressed by *ἀφίστημι* or *διίστημι*. In explaining *ἐπίσταναι*, therefore, we cannot start from the primary meaning 'separate.' To begin with, *ἐπίσταναι* is not directly connected with *ἐφίστημι*, as Prof. Hempl seems to imply in giving the Ionic form *ἐπίσταναι*. *Ἐπίσταναι* is a compound of *ἐπί* and the unreduplicated *-σταναι* (cf. Brugmann, *Grd.* ii, 889), whereas *ἐφίστημι* is a compound of the reduplicated *ἴστημι*. The two verbs are of course alike in composition, but they are different in formation. We may, therefore, refer to *ἐφίστημι* in explaining *ἐπίσταναι*. In the literal sense *ἐφίστημι* means, according to Liddell and Scott's *Greek-English Lexicon*, 'set on,' 'set over,' 'place upon,' 'set by or near to,' and in the middle voice and the intransitive tenses, 'stand on, over, near, by,' etc. These are the regular and most frequently occurring meanings. The word is used figuratively in *ἐφίστημι τὴν γνώμην*, *—τὴν διάνοιαν* 'apply one's thoughts to, attend,' and so frequently used absolutely *ἐπιστάναι* 'attend,' *ἐπιστῆσαι τινα ἐπὶ τι* 'call one's attention to a thing.' From these uses come *ἐπιστάδων* 'attentively, earnestly,' *ἐπιστάδία* 'oversight, command,' 'attention, care,' *ἐπιστάτης* 'overseer, superintendent,' *ἐπίσταναι* 'fix one's mind upon, believe, be confident of, know, understand,' etc. In the face of such evidence there need be no doubt as to the primary meaning of *ἐπίσταναι*.

The development of the meaning 'turn one's attention to, give heed to' to 'perceive, understand' is a common one. Compare Lat. *anim-adverto* 'pay attention to, attend to, regard, observe, perceive, understand,' (*animus*) *at-tendo* 'give heed to, consider,' MHG. *war-nemen* 'wahrnehmen,' Skt. *cēṭati* 'observe, consider, be intent upon, understand, know,' ON. *gaumr* 'attention,' Goth. *gaumjan* 'attend to, observe, perceive, see,' Goth. *sōkjan* 'seek, strive for,' Lat. *sāgio* 'perceive quickly,' and so many others.

Now it is possible that OE. *forstandan*, OHG. *firstantan*, *firstān* 'verstehen' may have meant primarily 'stand before,' and hence 'watch, observe, perceive, understand.' So Schade, *Wb.*, explains them. This interpretation I considered when writing my first article on these words. But it seemed on the whole more probable that Germ. *verstehen*, *vernehmen*, OE. *under-*

standan, *underniman*, *undergietan* all belonged to one class and were explained by OHG. *fir-neman* 'wegnehmen, in besitz nehmen, vernehmen, wahrnehmen;' and that *verstehen*, *understand* are both based on the transitive use of the root *stā-*, *stē-*, which is found by the side of the intransitive use from IE. time down to the present.

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GERMAN FOLKLORE.

Neue Beiträge zur Kenntnis des Volksrätsels, von ROBERT PETSCH. [Palæstra: Untersuchungen und Texte aus der deutschen und englischen Philologie. Herausgegeben von ALOIS BRANDL und ERICH SCHMIDT. IV]. Berlin, 1899. 8vo, pp. 152.

MORE than a century after Herder's statement¹ that the riddle summed up the innermost workings of a nation's mind, more than half a century after Wackernagel's well-known characterization,² the folk-riddle is coming into its own, as not the least worthy branch of the science of folklore. The monotony of these years of waiting has been often broken by the appearance of books and magazine articles which dealt in whole or in part with riddles;³ scientific description and investigation of them, however (along the line laid down by Richard Heinzel),⁴ the collection of variants by the comparative method, a consideration of the riddle's relation to the other branches of popular *Kleinpoesie*, treatment of it according to its inner and outer form,—such were utterly lacking. The reason for this is not far to seek: no collection of the larger sort was at hand, and it

was not until the year 1897 that Wossidlo's book furnished partial foundation for such consistent and searching investigation.

This book contains two thousand one hundred and forty-one riddles, collected for the most part from the lips of the people. Such astonishing abundance of material furnishes convincing proof of the vigorous imagination, the keen observation of nature, the sound philosophy, and the indestructible humor of the people.⁵ Wossidlo's collection is the basis of Dr. Petsch's study.⁶ As there is no correspondingly large South-German collection, Renk's *Volksrätsel aus Tirol (Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde*, v, 1895, pp. 147-160) is used. Other collections are frequently cited for comparison.⁷

Petsch would divide all riddles into two classes: 1) Real riddles; that is, those whose purpose is to paraphrase an object by clothing the description of it in a veiled poetic dress, intended to stimulate thought, or even—it may be—to confuse it: which object may be guessed from the statement of its appearance, its origin, its activity, etc.; 2) Unreal riddles; that is, those which defy guessing, but in which the questioner generally has the intention to give the solution himself: these take advantage of the listener, try to tease him, and are, therefore, just because the solution is impossible to the uninitiated, not real, but rather unreal riddles. This division of Petsch's is exact, trustworthy and important, because investigation has been hitherto content to class all riddles as 1) Rimed Riddles, 2) Prose Jestling-Questions (*Scherzfragen*).

⁵ Cf. Hauffen's review in *Euphorion*, v, p. 735.

⁶ A companion book to Wossidlo's in importance and interest is Pitre's *Indovinelli, dubbi, scioglilingua del popolo siciliano* (=Biblioteca delle tradizioni popolari siciliane, xx), 1897.

⁷ But rarely is the title of these cited works given anywhere in full: one is compelled to guess which book is meant. For example, 'Chambers' is Chambers, *Popular Rhymes of Scotland*, Edinburgh and London, new edition, 1870; 'Gregor' is Gregor, *Notes on the Folklore of the North-East of Scotland*, (Folk-Lore Society, Publ., vii) London, 1881; etc. Frequent misspellings of proper names cause confusion: I note as wrong: Wonste (p. 56), Frieschbier (17), Doornkaat-Krolman (54), Petor (89), Giananandrea (52), Schmeller (112), Rachholz (73), Rochholtz (61), and others. To quote Dr. Petsch's own words (*Herrig's Archiv*, cil, p. 403): "Such discrepancies should surely be removed, else what is the editor there for?"

¹ In *Vom Geiste der ebräischen Poesie*.

² *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum*, iii, 1843, p. 25 f.

³ For bibliography, cf. Wossidlo, *Mecklenburgische Volksüberlieferungen. I. Rätsel*. Wismar, 1897, pp. 259-271.

⁴ Which method in another place (*Herrig's Archiv*, cil, 1899, p. 400) Petsch characterizes as sober, cautious scientific investigation, contrasting it with

"the wahlhall-drunk, myth-scenting, phantastical ravings of the last, dwarflike followers of Jacob Grimm, of whom Moritz Haupt prophesied, that there would soon be no crowing cock and no stinking goat, in which they would not discover a Germanic god."

Mr Gummere rightly refers to Jacob Grimm as "the thrice-battered" (*Old Engl. Ballads*, xlix).